STATUS REPORT ON
THE MISSOURI JUVENILE JUSTICE
INFORMATION SYSTEM PROJECT

DECEMBER 2003

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The implementation of the Missouri Juvenile Justice Information System (MOJJIS) marks the beginning of statewide juvenile justice information sharing in Missouri. Although we are only in the first phase of implementation, this report showcases the positive results of MOJJIS and the future of information sharing for the state, as well as our unique position within the nation.

Several state agencies are deserving of acknowledgement for their participation in the creation and development of MOJJIS. Specifically I would like to mention the Children's Division (formerly the Division of Family Services), Division of Youth Services, and Child Support Enforcement of the Department of Social Services; the Children's Psychiatric Services Division of the Department of Mental Health; the Department of Health and Senior Services; the Missouri Highway Patrol; and the Missouri Juvenile Justice Association. A special thank you to the Missouri Attorney General's Office for their assistance and support. Without the ongoing commitment and collaboration of these departments, this effort would have failed.

The creation of MOJJIS has placed the sharing of juvenile information within a secure electronic business protocol to meet decision making needs. MOJJIS has the potential to make a tremendous impact on the prevention and intervention services that can be provided to juveniles and their families, as well as promote community safety. Juvenile justice professionals now will be able to provide higher levels of service and to make better informed decisions than in the past when information was unavailable. MOJJIS will help juvenile justice professionals be more accountable and responsive to the needs of children, their families, and communities.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In July of 1997, the Missouri Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA) initiated a comprehensive juvenile court automation and integrated information-sharing project throughout the state. One key component is the Missouri Juvenile Justice Information System (MOJJIS), a common, secure communication network that links the juvenile and family courts to collaborative executive branch agencies that serve youth.

Though the planning of MOJJIS has been underway since 1998, the actual implementation of the system began on September 1, 2003. Thus, this is still a very new tool for staff at the juvenile and family courts and other participating agencies. The users and key informants who provided input for this report have very limited experience with MOJJIS to date, and process goals are difficult to assess. Users have had MOJJIS access for just over 60 days and cannot speak to outcomes at the client level. While 28 of the state's 45 circuits are participating in some capacity, only a small percentage (4 circuits, or less than 10%) are at full pilot participation. Fourteen circuits are providing juvenile office and juvenile court data into JIS this is extracted into MOJJIS. These fourteen circuits may initiate requests for information. Because of the limited scope and duration of the project so far, it is not possible to measure its impact at this juncture. Therefore, this report presents a summary of the implementation of the MOJJIS project to date. It describes project accomplishments/milestones, the general implementation process, summarizes users' experiences, and identifies challenges and possible barriers to success. Anticipated short- and long-term benefits are discussed and recommendations for ongoing implementation and evaluation are presented.

Project Overview

MOJJIS is a database that establishes a common electronic interface across agencies, integrating key pieces of data from youth records entered and stored in the databases of participating agencies. It was developed by OSCA in collaboration with leaders from the juvenile and family courts and Departments of Social Services, Mental Health, Health and Senior Services, and Elementary and Secondary Education.

MOJJIS advances the state of automation and information-sharing beyond another important component of OSCA's overall automation project, the Justice Information System (JIS). JIS is the case management system that tracks referral history, services, and sanctions on court-referred youth, and will ultimately be available statewide. Though an inquiry via JIS initially yields more data than does a MOJJIS inquiry, MOJJIS provides a convenient gateway for accessing information on services and youth history across multiple agencies. MOJJIS represents an innovation because, traditionally, information-sharing across agency boundaries has been uneven and piecemeal. Ultimately, MOJJIS can strengthen inter-agency collaboration in addition to improving service delivery at the individual client level. Eventually, the juvenile/family courts from all of Missouri's 45 circuits will be linked via MOJJIS, as well the following agencies:

- ❑ Division of Youth Services (DYS)
- ❑ Department of Social Services (DSS)
- ❑ Department of Mental Health (DMH)
- ❑ Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS)

The system includes built-in safeguards to protect sensitive, confidential data. One important aspect is that MOJJIS is not a full relational database that integrates all client data in the

participating systems. Rather, it matches identifying information on a youth in one agency's system (the requestor's agency) with information in another agency's system (the responding agency). It provides verification that the youth received services from and participated in programs at the responding agency, along with agency contact information, including a secure e-mail hot link that allows the requestor to promptly seek further information. The data is extracted into MOJJIS from participating agencies' pre-existing databases. The system is refreshed weekly to ensure data is accurate and up-to-date.

Per Section 210.865 RSMo., all client information remains subject to the same confidentiality requirements imposed by the agency that collects and maintains the data. In other words, agencies are sharing the same information they were allowed to share prior to the advent of MOJJIS. In certain circumstances, releases from clients or parents/guardians may be required.

Many sources described strong inter-agency collaboration between courts, DYS, DSS, and DMH. However, the level and intensity of these collaborations is very uneven across circuits. Courts and other agencies that serve youth and families can reap significant benefits from improved methods of information-sharing. Through MOJJIS, professionals who serve youth and their families can track services received across other agencies. Once a direct service worker learns a client has had contact with another agency, he/she can request further data regarding diagnoses, placement, services delivered, court sanctions, and outcomes of these services and sanctions. This information has tremendous implications in assessment of youth, types of intervention that are appropriate, classification decisions (for youth in placement), and sanctions. Without prompt access to this information, service delivery can be fragmented, redundant, inappropriate, and/or inadequate.

Methods and data sources

Information for this report was provided during individual interviews, a meeting with key OSCA personnel that included a MOJJIS demonstration, and a series of focus groups. The focus groups were conducted via conference calls. Participants included (a) juvenile/family court staff, primarily Juvenile Officers (JOs); (b) DSS personnel in pilot circuit counties; and (c) DYS Regional Coordinators, Case Managers, Service Coordinators, and clerical staff. Some, but not all, of the juvenile/family court participants were from pilot sites. At least one representative from every pilot site was in a focus group.

The agency administrators who are the single point of contact for DMH and DSS not only participated in the focus groups but also were interviewed independently to clarify points raised in the group discussions. The DYS Data Processing Coordinator was interviewed. The OSCA Director of Juvenile and Adult Court Programs and the Juvenile Court Work Flow Coordinator provided ongoing clarification and answered questions raised by focus group participants.

Because focus groups are essentially structured group interviews, focus group participants will be referred to in this report as "interview participants," as will those sources that were interviewed individually. OSCA personnel and executive agency managers who have extensive knowledge of this project are generally designated herein as "key informants."

Additional information came from several documents that span the course of the project, including inter-agency memoranda; correspondence from OSCA to legislators, funding sources, and other stakeholders; the *MOJJIS User Requirements Manual*; and brief reports and updates prepared by OSCA throughout various stages of the project.

I also reviewed existing literature on court automation and reports/descriptions of similar projects in order to learn about successes and challenges with automated information-sharing in other states. This research revealed that there are very few projects of this sort underway and none of this scope (involving statewide cross-agency information-sharing). Further, there is a marked dearth of literature on evaluation of projects that involve automated information-sharing systems. Thus, the Missouri project appears to be the first of its kind in the nation, and has potential to serve as a demonstration project for other states that seek to enhance information-sharing between courts and other agencies.

II. PROJECT BACKGROUND

In September 1998, OSCA spearheaded the formation of the Missouri Juvenile Justice Information System Task Team in response to Section 210.865 RSMo. This statute authorized the Office of State Courts Administrator and the Departments of Social Services, Elementary and Secondary Education[1], Health and Senior Services, Mental Health, and the Juvenile and Family Divisions of the Circuit Courts to coordinate information systems to promote better information-sharing and tracking of children who come in contact with or are provided services by these agencies and the juvenile divisions of the circuit courts.

The MOJJIS Task Team had the overall responsibility for developing and implementing this system. There were delays in the early stages of the project due to concerns about the confidentiality of the proposed system. Task Team members did not have the authority to commit their agency to providing the information in all cases. The MOJJIS Task Team agreed that a statutory addition was needed to tighten the confidentiality requirement of information-sharing that was enacted in August of 2000. The Juvenile Information Governance Commission was created in 2001 as a result of the passage of House Bill 236. The Commission is comprised of department directors of executive agencies, the Administrator of OSCA, and a judge and juvenile officer from both a circuit in a first-class county and a multi-county circuit. This Commission, now the governing body of MOJJIS, was charged with authorizing categories and types of information to be shared between the executive agencies and the juvenile and family courts.

Phase I (which began with the formation of the MOJJIS Task Team and continued through mid-2003) involved building the collaborative framework among the partner agencies. Key tasks included identification of the designated contact at the partner agencies, selection of data elements

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[1] However, because DESE does not collect and maintain information that has relevance to the object of the legislation, or have need of this information from other agencies, it is exempt from the Memorandum of Understanding that frames the agreement among the other agencies.

for inclusion in the system, preparation of the Memorandum of Understanding and a Cooperative Agreement on Information-Sharing, selection of pilot sites, and bridging agencies' secure e-mail systems. Also during Phase I, the product application was built and tested by OSCA technology staff.

During an evaluation of the overall juvenile justice court automation project, several sources were interviewed regarding concerns and expectations of MOJJIS. At the time the evaluation was completed (April 2003), most juvenile justice professionals in the field had very little knowledge about how the final MOJJIS "product" would look, and thus, limited ability to predict its impact on their work. There was still a good deal of apprehension regarding precisely what types of data would be stored in the repository and who would have access – not merely which executive agencies, but which staff at these agencies. Now, less than one year later, these same sources express much more confidence in the system and the safeguards that are in place.

Four circuits, the 6th, 34th, 37th, and 42nd, were selected as full pilot sites. Full participation is defined as the circuit having at least one staff member, the Juvenile Officer, trained as a requestor who responds to requests for data. These four circuits are providing data on both formal and informal court involvement. Twenty-four other circuits that have JIS are entering data that is then extracted into MOJJIS. Staff at these circuits may also make requests. Of these, fourteen circuits provide formal and informal court involvement, and fourteen other circuits provide only formal court data. The four pilot sites began use of the system on September 1, 2003.

III. CURRENT STATUS

This section summarizes the findings from the evaluation of the <u>initial implementation</u> <u>stages</u> of the pilot project. Juvenile court and other agency staff that participated in the focus groups and interviews identified concerns and offered suggestions for improvements. Observations about positive features and expectations of benefits over time are presented here as well.

Learning to use new tools, having access to more information, and having to respond to more information requests creates new tasks for staff. Initially, MOJJIS can increase staff workloads. To a large extent, the success of MOJJIS will be contingent on the ease with which it fits into staff's daily routines and how promptly impediments, even minor ones, can be overcome. Thus, the problems and concerns discussed in this section should be given careful attention, even though some are fairly minor. Whenever possible, users' recommendations/suggestions should be implemented. When not possible, users should be provided with an explanation as to why a recommendation or suggestion is not followed.

Overall, users viewed the system as very user-friendly and simple to navigate. In part, this reflects the participating agencies' continually increasing use of automation as a means of gathering information and communicating. DSS and juvenile court staff are becoming more adept at using computers as well as various programs and systems. It also reflects a well-planned system that has been carefully designed to be accessible to a wide array of personnel with various needs and skill levels. Juvenile and family court staff who have already undergone the transition to JIS were relieved to find that MOJJIS implementation, unlike JIS, does not involve a major transition but simply builds off the data they are entering into JIS. There is still a tendency for staff not involved in the pilot to confuse MOJJIS with JIS, and they are, therefore, daunted at the prospect of MOJJIS

implementation. As new circuits move into implementation of MOJJIS, it will be helpful to reinforce the differences between the two systems.

Because the project is in the early stages, users could offer very few specific examples of how the information obtained through MOJJIS has affected case management and/or service delivery decisions regarding youth. The DSS central point of contact received no inquiries in the first 30 days, and nine inquiries during the second month. However, requests more than doubled in the third month and by the start of the fourth month of the pilot, a total of 30 inquiries had been received. This reflects the tendency for new projects to gradually take hold as the use of new tools becomes more familiar.

At most sites, only the Juvenile Officer is trained and approved as a requestor, so very few juvenile/family court staff have hands-on experience with the system. Further, while 28 circuits are involved in some aspect of the pilot effort, many users are unaware of this. Several sources stated that they thought MOJJIS only contained information on youth at "those few circuits that have JIS." Both court staff and DSS staff tended to underestimate how many circuits had JIS (and thus put data into MOJJIS). This means they underestimate the chances of getting a "hit" on a youth and acquiring new information from other circuits. The incentive to make a query was lower than would be if they knew that more than half of the circuits are on JIS and, therefore, inputting data that shows up in a MOJJIS query.

At this point in the pilot phase, DMH provides only a central contact person with a secure e-mail hot link. Because MOJJIS is not drawing down data from the DMH database, a query does not yield immediate information as to whether or not a youth had DMH involvement. When a request is received, DMH will check their system to see if the individual has received services from any of the 3 divisions (Divisions of Alcohol and Drug Abuse, Comprehensive Psychiatric Services, and

Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities) and immediately provide that information to the requestor. If the requestor desires more detailed information, they will receive the name of the appropriate local contact to access the child's treatment information. The central contact reported that he has received no requests for information during these first 60 days. This may be due to the newness of the project, or it may be attributed to the fact that there is no actual client-level data from DMH. It is likely that requests for information from DMH will be relatively rare, and the benefits of collaboration and having access to mental health data will be less (than with other agencies) until DMH is integrated into MOJJIS.

Many active users of MOJJIS reported running queries for which they found a match. However, nearly all of these were run by staff as tests, using youth they already knew had contact with another agency. Users did provide examples of how the data could be meaningful and fill an unmet need in their work. Anticipated benefits include better service planning, more comprehensive histories to provide to the court, and more opportunities for inter-agency collaborations, such as staffings. Some specific scenarios for use were raised by participants. For instance, a DYS staff member that handles interstate compact cases must often respond to requests for information on runaways from other states. Through MOJJIS, information about a youth's home county can be located.

Queries are tracked centrally through the OSCA's Information Technology unit. Approximately midway through the third month of the project, a total of 385 queries had been run (Table 1). It should be noted that the term "failed" only refers to the fact that a youth was not involved with any other agencies.

Table 1: MOJJIS Queries

Agency	Successful	Failed
Courts	198	89
Division of Family Services/Children's Division	51	11
Division of Youth Services	136	46
Total	385 (73%)	146 (27%)

The fact that 73% of queries yielded a hit is important and suggests that: (a) most youth have been involved with at least one or more agencies; and/or (b) staff are typically running queries on those youth that they suspect having involvement with other agencies. Comments from those interviewed thus far offer support for the latter.

Interview participants also talked about the inadequacy of relying on parents' self-report regarding youth's history with other agencies. They acknowledged that families are often not forthright about their histories for a variety of reasons. One Juvenile Officer pointed out that even the minimal information contained in MOJJIS, the fact of a youth's involvement with another agency, could be time-consuming to obtain through traditional inquiries. He described the frustrations of his staff "spinning their wheels" trying to get information from other agencies, only to ultimately find out the youth had no contact with them.

None of the managers or administrators that provided input believed that, prior to MOJJIS, staff routinely sought information about other agency involvement. No Juvenile Officer or other agency supervisor/administrator that was interviewed reported having a policy requiring staff to seek this information. Furthermore, not one juvenile court worker who provided input for this report said they made routine inquiries of DSS on every youth seen. This was true even though all persons interviewed acknowledged the benefits of having this information. Clearly, one reason for not doing routine inquiries is that staff simply does not have time for phone calls that will often result in dead

ends. They said that they may make a single inquiry by phone, but if they do not hear back from the other agency, they simply drop the matter, assuming that that agency had nothing to report. MOJJIS allows them to get a definitive yes/no response regarding a youth's involvement with DFS or DYS within seconds.

However, some interview participants went on to say that there were strong informal networks of communication between courts and local DSS offices that they believe serve the same purpose as MOJJIS. They said that they could readily find out if a youth referred to the court was in the DSS database if they chose to. Yet most did not regularly request this information. They tended to inquire only if family reported DSS involvement, circumstances suggested DSS involvement was likely, or they learned about it incidentally. Some juvenile courts in rural communities share office space with DSS and they see families come and go from one another's offices.

One key informant agreed that the informal networks are the most common means of obtaining information, especially in the rural communities, and that these are useful for many purposes. However, she felt that such networks, which rely on "who knows who" and longevity with an agency, are often "hit-or-miss" in terms of ensuring that a worker has accurate, up-to-date, and comprehensive information on youth. MOJJIS can fill the gaps that are inherent in the informal networks.

An administrator at a circuit in a large urban community pointed out that informal communication is not as reliable there due to the sheer volume of clients that flow through systems in large communities. This court currently relies on what is termed the DSS spindle – a local DSS contact that can give court personnel information about whether DSS has had contact with a family. However, there are problems with this method. The line is often busy, discouraging workers from pursuing contact, or the contact is unable to confirm whether a family was involved with DSS.

The tendency to not proactively seek information is not a matter of the information having low value. Rather, some juvenile court personnel are confident that it is rare for them to be unaware of a youth's involvement with other agencies. Similarly, they did not think it likely youth were referred to courts in other circuits without them being aware of this. Some said they would only run a MOJJIS check if a youth was not a lifelong resident of their county or circuit. They believe only a small percentage have been referred to juvenile courts in other Missouri circuits before. One Juvenile Officer estimated that 95% of youth referred to his court are life-long residents of one or more of the counties in his circuit.

In one JO's opinion, many of his counterparts (at other circuits) will not require staff to use MOJJIS, but will leave it to their discretion. He further believes most juvenile officers will only initiate inquiries on a youth when they have some prior knowledge or reason to suspect involvement with other courts or agencies. The real value of MOJJIS lays with its ability to alert staff to court/agency involvement they would <u>not</u> have known about otherwise. Unfortunately, if juvenile officers and other line staff are not expected to make routine queries, regardless of what they think they know, this benefit will not be realized. Some JOs acknowledged that it is <u>highly likely</u> that their staff often underestimate the chances a youth had court involvement outside of their circuit, or was involved with DFS, DMH, or DYS. Key informants at both DYS and DFS confirmed that direct service workers at these agencies, too, were apt to underestimate involvement with other agencies, particularly DMH.

Thus far, no participating agency or circuit has introduced a policy requiring MOJJIS checks be run on youth. Two JOs in the pilot sites reported plans to incorporate a requirement into office policy for routine queries about every youth. An administrator at a circuit not in the pilot project stated it is likely that once her circuit is using MOJJIS, routine queries will be required by policy,

since she could see no disadvantage to this. She pointed out that while the added tasks associated with querying and following through would slightly increase workload in the short-term, the long-term gains would outweigh this. Time would be saved because they could "close more doors" and not pursue services and interventions that had been ineffective in the past. Several other JOs had not yet made a decision regarding policy changes, but also stated it will likely become policy. At minimum, they will strongly encourage routine use. DYS staffers interviewed could not comment as to whether their agency will eventually adopt a policy requiring it. However, individuals in key positions at both DFS and DYS indicated that, given the ease with which the information can be obtained and its potential value to service planning, placement, and classification decisions, they will opt to run routine queries on all of their clients.

It is strongly recommended that at least one circuit experiment with mandatory MOJJIS checks and maintain logs on the results of these checks. This could provide a clearer picture for workers as to how much they actually know about a youth's history via informal or incidental communication methods with other agencies, the youth's or parents' self-report, or knowledge of the youth in the community. If staff are underestimating what they know, this experience would raise awareness of the benefits of MOJJIS, may lead other circuits and agencies to adopt a policy mandating checks, and enhance decision-making and service delivery in the long-term.

Other problems brought out during the focus groups were limited to the experiences of only one or two users. For instance, one source from a juvenile court reported her "test queries" did not yield a hit, even though she knew the youths had cases open with the local DSS office. However, this applied to only a few cases. The sample of queries/users so far is too small to generalize from in terms of data accuracy. What was more noteworthy, though, was that the court staff member did not

know to whom this omission should be reported. User protocols or training should include instructions for users to report such problems.

Also, while most sources indicated they had trust in one another's databases and believed the information to be accurate and up-to-date, it would be beneficial to provide assurances of quality control measures among participating agencies. If confidence in one another's system wanes when staff find omissions and errors, confidence in the MOJJIS system will decline as well, and users will opt not to make queries.

Conflicting information was given regarding the length of time with which requests were responded to, and it is not possible to draw conclusions as to whether staff are waiting too long for information (diminishing the likelihood they will use the system). There is not even consensus as to what is "too long." Yet because MOJJIS does not give direct access to meaningful client data, its greatest asset may be that it provides an expedient means for staff to establish contact with other agencies and gather client data. Thus, a premium should be placed on expedient responses to requests. At present, there are no guidelines regarding how quickly staff should respond. The central points of contact indicated they are responding typically within a day. The DSS point of contact provides an automatic response e-mail with a back-up contact when she is out of the office. But, as some sources pointed out, this does not preclude delays at the level of the direct service worker that may be the next line of contact regarding the client's case. It was suggested that response timeframes be included in the guidelines for *all* staff at participating agencies who are in a position to respond to requests.

As indicated earlier, the requesting procedure is quite simple and straightforward. Requestors are only expected to provide enough information to distinguish the youth about which they are making the request from other youth with the same or similar name. Typically, the date of

birth and departmental client number are sufficient to do this. Nevertheless, users on the responding

end reported they are frequently getting incomplete information from the requestor, often just a

name. This necessitates another step in the process, in which the responding agency has to contact

the Requestor for more information. As stated above, expediency is one of the chief advantages of

MOJJIS, and benefits are diluted when multiple contacts must be made. Also, one administrator

who is the central point of contact reported receiving a request in which the Requestor did not

provide her name or agency affiliation. The respondent had to verify the Requestor's name and

affiliation, and that she was a valid user before the request could be fulfilled. As this is an important

security issue, the need to verify one's status as a Requestor was addressed in training and the *Users*

Requirements Manual. It may be that users are so accustomed to informal e-mail communication

that this was overlooked in the initial request.

Interview sources proposed a simple solution to the problem of inadequate information,

requiring all users to attach a "Juvenile Information Request" form. This form includes the

necessary data to verify the Requestor is a valid user. Completion of the youth data section can

greatly reduce the chances that he/she will be confused with another.

Interview participants raised other minor concerns. Currently, DSS provides only an e-mail

address (with a hot link) for the central point of contact. Juvenile office staff prefer the ability to

make phone or fax contact as alternatives to increase the likelihood of a prompt response. Also, if a

fax number is available, staff can send signed releases (when needed) along with the request, all in a

single step. However, DSS has opted to provide only the e-mail for the single point of contact in

order to have a simple method for tracking inquiries received. The e-mail provides a clear paper

trail that is lost when phone contact is made. A simple change that would satisfy users and ensure

tracking would be to include the alternate contacts but require the user to send an e-mail noting that

a request was made via the alternate method. Given the ease with which e-mail can be sent, the procedure can hardly be regarded as inconvenient.

Some users found the initial sign-in procedure to be time-consuming and confusing. Because this is a one-time procedure though, it was regarded as an insignificant problem. Staff may require Help Desk assistance at this point, but it is not an ongoing need. A related issue involves the type of password assigned. Specifically, passwords are case-sensitive; they must include eight digits/letters, and users reported they are not easy to commit to memory. Passwords must be changed every 90 days. The relative complexity appears to stem from security needs. While users see this as a drawback to the system, most recognize that such procedures are essential due to the sensitive and confidential nature of the data. They did inquire about the possibility of using the same password for both JIS and MOJJIS. According to OSCA project staff, this is an option (though the MOJJIS password must contain both upper- and lower-case letters). Users can create their own passwords (with some restrictions on case and a requisite number of letters/digits). However, since some users remain under the impression that they cannot select their own passwords, and find the assigned ones cumbersome, they may be less inclined to use the system routinely. To minimize inconvenience and encourage use, it would be beneficial to circulate simple instructions on creating passwords (a refresher of what was received in the initial training).

Interview participants were satisfied with the MOJJIS training in terms of its content, duration, and convenience. The only complaint concerned the timing of the training in regard to the start-up date for the project. Several users felt the lag between the two was longer than desirable and their skills and knowledge had deteriorated slightly. Also, some court administrators were uncertain regarding expectations for training the rest of their staff. They did not know whether they were approved to train their own staff, who could then begin using the system (after signing the

confidentiality form), or whether they should enroll the staff in training through OSCA. The consensus was that the training was uncomplicated enough that, given approval, they could train their own staff.

Training needs that may not have been covered and are not fully addressed in the *User Requirements Manual*, include: (a) creating a password that the user can easily remember; (b) whether the JOs are expected to train their staff as users or to enroll them in MOJJIS training; and (c) number of circuits providing court data into the system. Also, staff could benefit from refresher instructions on the protocol for inquiries and how to use the "Juvenile Information Request" form as an attachment when requesting information. The instructions for this <u>are</u> included in the *Users Requirements Manual*, but it appears these are not being closely followed. If possible, the best method may be to display the reminder to attach the form when users make the query, and provide a "help menu" with instructions.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for maximizing benefits as well as strengthening support for MOJJIS and the overall Juvenile Court Automation Project are discussed here. While it is not always feasible to follow through on recommendations offered by users, close attention to staff concerns and areas where they lack complete information can promote regular use and help ensure user buy-in.

- **Clear request protocols/guidelines or policies** - Ensure staff have a working knowledge of the protocol for making requests of an agency when a "match" is found. The simplest method for doing this may be to make the now-optional Juvenile Information Request form a required attachment to all requests. Provide reminders within the system if possible so that these are presented when a user makes a query.

- **Response time guidelines** - Participating agencies should agree to guidelines for all staff that are in a position to respond to inquiries. Most information of relevance is not contained in MOJJIS but is to be provided via contacts to a designated agency head or direct service worker. Thus, most, if not all, staff at participating agencies must be trained regarding expectations for time-frame for responding.

- **Quality control** - OSCA should work with agency administrators to promote ongoing quality control. Confidence in the system will be heightened if users have reasonable assurance that client data are being entered by all agencies in a timely and accurate manner, and that sensitive data will be safeguarded across all agencies.

- **Timeliness of training** - Offer training as close as possible to the implementation start date.

Finally, it is recommended that OSCA develop a plan to gather data on short- and long-term indicators of success. Possible performance indicators of interest are:

(a) *Workload reductions/shifts* – Does having tools with which to obtain better information produce measurable changes in the amount of time juvenile justice professionals spend on essential case-management tasks and supervising and providing services to youth? Does access to more tools with which to acquire information *increase* workloads? (This may be of concern only at the larger circuits, which handle a tremendous volume of cases.)

(b) *Use of information in decisions* – Is there evidence that staff are acquiring information via MOJJIS that otherwise would not have been acquired, and using this to inform case-management and service delivery decisions? If so, does this information (i) reduce

redundant service delivery; (ii) enhance service planning; (iii) affect sanctions; and/or (iv) affect placement or classification decisions?

(c) *Collaborative relationships* – Do juvenile justice personnel and personnel at other youth-serving agencies participate more frequently in case staffings and engage in other forms of case-based collaboration more often?

Conclusion

Juvenile justice and other youth service professionals routinely make decisions that can significantly affect the lives of youth and their families, as well as the communities they serve. They do so with scarce resources and often under short timelines. By increasing the range and depth of knowledge about clients and expediting information-sharing, MOJJIS has the potential to have a tremendous impact on service planning, day-to-day decision-making, and multi-agency collaboration. Staff are held to higher levels of accountability and cannot excuse poor service planning or coordination as due to unavailability of information. Services can be provided within a seamless and integrated framework, and youth and families are not likely to become "lost" in the system or shuffled from agency to agency without clear purpose. A system that promotes cross-agency collaboration and information-sharing can result in a more consistent and comprehensive service delivery that meets clients needs and ultimately build public confidence in the courts and juvenile justice system.